Introduction

The idea of fate is one of the many motifs included in *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. It is used as a recurring theme to explain the events of the play to add depth and meaning. The idea fate in Elizabethan England was widely accepted as truth and all encompassing. Fate was typically depicted as the wheel of fortune in that time and was used to explain many things like whether or not someone would contract the black plague which was spreading at the time. Because fate was such a large part of society media writers at the time used it in their works as a way to appeal to their audience. Due to this *Romeo and Juliet* includes numerous references to fate and uses it as a guiding plot device throughout the play.

1.

The idea that fate is the overarching decider as to the outcomes of the protagonists is prolific. During the very start of the play the prologue the narrator sets the scene then immediately informs the audience to the ending the play by saying *‘A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life;/ Whose misadventured piteous overthrows/ Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife./ The fearful passage of their death-marked love.’*(Prologe.6-9) This removes the surprise from the ending of the play and turns the intrigue to why these people would commit suicide. This is also the first instance of fate as a theme in the play where it uses the metaphor of ‘star-crossed’ and it informs us of the protagonist's destiny right away. This quote can be interpreted in two main ways. The first being that the characters fate were already decided and always unchangeable regardless of the characters actions. This is due to language such as ‘deathmarked’ and ‘star-crossed’. It can also be interpreted that this is simply the narrators remark who is separate from the play itself and knows the what the characters actions will be and the result of their actions in a meta-story sense but not in a lack of freewill or unchangeable fate sense. Though this may be the case, it does imply that in the story that fate is used as it foreshadowed at many times in the play that fate has an overwhelming impact on what happened the protagonist's.

2.

The second idea of fate displayed in Romeo and Juliet is that the outcomes of the play are not caused by fate itself but the actions and mistakes of others. This is most seen the character of Friar Lawrence whose actions had the largest direct impact on the outcomes of the protagonists. It was his plan to save Romeo and Juliet failing which cause them to take their lives. Using this one could say that it was not fate nor their own actions but the actions of others. However so many coincidences such as Friar John failing to deliver the letter, Balthasar finding Romeo and Apothecary selling the poison makes it is clear that the failure of the plan was a part the fate of the characters from the beginning.

3.

The third idea of fate appears near the end of the play when Romeo hears of Juliet’s death, he says *‘Is it e’en so?—Then I deny you, stars!—/ Thou knowest my lodging. Get me ink and paper,/ And hire post-horses. I will hence tonight.’*(V.i.25-27). referencing the start of the prologue. Romeo states clearly that he will defy his fate and will somehow find a way to live together with Juliet. This example is dramatic ironic because as we, the audience, knows that Juliet is not really dead and just under the effects of Friar Lawrence’s potion. This may give us hope that romeo may really defy his fate set out in the prologue as that is literally what he says he will do. This idea that freewill governs the outcomes of an individual is the polar opposite of the initial idea in the beginning of the play. However even after not accepting it he is still be subjected to his fate and the two do end there own lives when they say *‘Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.’*(V.iii.120) and *‘This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die.’*(V.iii.175). This further reinforces the idea that fate was the factor in deciding the deaths of Romeo and Juliet as even when trying the exercise his freewill and shatter his fate he is unsuccessful and succumbs.

Conclusion

It is clear that through the play of *Romeo and Juliet* that fate was ultimately the deciding factor in the deaths of Romeo and Juliet and governed the outcome of the play from the beginning. This is shown by the language features and many references to fate throughout the play.